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ABSTRACT

This document reviews the many discrepancies and problems in counselor training and attempts to provide concrete suggestions for improvement. Honest self-appraisal and development are viewed as prerequisites to the development of helping relationships with others. Typically, counselors are trained to model behavior in isolation, to emphasize therapy rather than prevention, to function in an environment separate from that of their clients, and to operate without understanding the goals of the institution. The counselor emulates behavior which may prevent him from identifying himself; and he often counsels in a setting where interaction is restricted. For effective counseling, the author outlines the following conditions: (1) counselors must counsel in the client's world; (2) they must counsel within the framework of the institutions which utilize their services; (3) counselors must perceive of themselves as educators; (4) areas in which they can be effective leaders must be defined and then entered; (5) they must define roles and priorities consistent with their personalities; (6) they have to learn how to help their clients understand the moral issues involved if realistic decisions are to result; and (7) counselors need to work in learning systems where interactive behavior permits personal and professional growth. (Author/PC)

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Counselors--Where Do You Get Your Inner Strength?

John A. Wellington

The process of becoming is a life-long experience. Learning to develop relationships with others requires learning to develop relationships with oneself which are as honest as those relationships we desire to establish with others. Therefore, in speaking of "inner strength," I am referring to the self-knowledge and confidence sought and attained by counselors-in-training and trained counselors if they are to become effective professionals.

The counselor-in-training develops skills through specialized learning structures. He learns to model many kinds of behavior. The trainers intentionally structure some of this behavior. Some modeling is developed as the trainee imitates the personal behavior of his trainers. Some behavior is imitated in order to gain acceptance, achieve positive self-regard, esteem, and approval from peers and professors. Within this operational system the student may or may not be made aware of the need to study, in depth, his own developmental system and need levels before undertaking skill-building experiences in which the trainee relates with clients.

The beginning counselor has probably completed a graduate program of approximately 36 semester hours in guidance and counseling. In this program he met the requirements for certification by achieving passing grades in specified competency-based experiences. In-depth training in these areas is limited. The need for a job to acquire experience and/or finances requires

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many trainees to take a part-time program further limiting some experiences desirable in field work. However, the importance of any training experience depends on the degree that the trainee had gained a working self-concept. In addition, the counselor knows little about institutional goals in our society and even less about the goals of a specific institution.

All training models have some limitations. All counselors have some limitations. But a major limitation that the counseling profession has developed for itself is a movement away from the concept of guidance to a treatment concept of therapy in which counselors feel threatened if they are not able to demonstrate the ability of experts, such as, Ellis, Rogers, or some professor.

The counselor is taught to function in a cell - four walls, a desk and several chairs. Warnath (1973) aptly cites this structure, "Tied to models of service delivery which have restricted their own world to the four walls of a counseling cubicle and absolved them from any responsibility for the institutional environment, they have been blind to the factors which have been influencing their work." (pp. 1 and 2) Although the reference is to the college setting, it is appropriate to the junior high school and senior high school counseling settings as well.

Warnath (1973) emphasizes two factors which are major limitations to effective counseling for the social scientist called counselor: (1) They are handicapped in utilizing their skills by functioning only in the counseling session, and (2) They have difficulty developing relationships to the main purposes and processes of their schools.

Let us return to the counselor-in-training. He enters the counseling

program for a variety of reasons: the next pay scale level, the good road to the administrative ranks, the socially acceptable way to escape from colleagues and/or the classroom, a way to find a means of resolving personal conflicts, the need for establishing personal relationships, the need for esteem and reward through grades and another degree, the need to gain personal worth and approval by directing others, the feeling of need to do something for others because these same conflicts were never resolved in himself at a certain age level, and the desire to relate to his own age group. Others select counseling because, out of experience, they have found that they are able to establish meaningful relationships with students in other than teaching situations which give them personal satisfaction and thus may be more effective in assisting in the total development of the student.

The counselor-in-training must be confused when he proceeds through the program, since there are courses dealing with guidance emphasis, but no experience provided. There are courses in counseling with multiple training experiences. Such programs dictate how the trainee should establish his priorities. The student is exposed to many skill-building training situations in which he is given the opportunity to open himself to others because it is the thing to do. These are often isolated training experiences which may be more destructive rather than constructive to the development of his self-concept.

In examining the literature on counselor training at the master's degree level, the role and function of the school counselor appears to be strongly perceived as that of a psychotherapist. There is more and more emphasis on abnormal personality structure and the treatment of the psychologically

disturbed student than on the normal personality development of all students to make a better adjustment in their total life experiences. However, it is encouraging to see the counseling profession beginning to reemphasize the need to assist students in accord with a self-concept career-development philosophy. The rapid movement away from a pure psychotherapeutic model is evidenced in a recent issue of The Personnel and Guidance Journal (1974) in which the multi-dimensional approaches of guidance and counseling reach out into the total educational environment of the student.

The counselor has had many behavior models demonstrated for him. The training models of his professors have become self-evident. There are other models of the trainer's behavior which may influence how the counselor perceives his role and function on the job. For example, the trainer may believe that individual counseling and research should hold priority, private practice and consulting may be stressed, or high political activity in professional organizations is personally and professionally important. Counselors learn to emulate these behaviors. These are some existing factors why some counselors have difficulty in defining their roles and thus continually grope for some self-identification. At this point, then, a question is posed: What factors must counselors consider in order to define themselves in their positions so that they may experience the satisfaction necessary to professional growth?

The counselor has been trained to think of himself as a psychotherapist with a private office and a built-in system of clients who will want and need his services. All his clients will need personal counseling and, through skill-building experiences, the counselor will achieve a level of facilitative

functioning of three or higher on the Carkhuff Scale. Unless he is very fortunate he will receive his practicum training on a university campus where he does not have to understand the goals of the institution, understand a particular community and its mores, interact with administrators and parents, nor with the faculty.

It is quite possible that the majority of counselors have never worked through their own self-concept. Warnath's (1971) statement referring to college students is applicable to counselors-in-training and to some who have attained the title of counselor. "To be able to relate an occupation to oneself in a meaningful way requires first that one know and understand oneself. Few young people have more than the most tentative notions about who they are." (p. 80)

Certainly, human relations training groups, T-groups, sensitivity groups, supervision sessions and similar experiences can do no more than set up basic exposure and confrontation structures. The trainee studies about other people through his entire program while he himself is in the way of his learning because the program rarely focuses on him, the potential counselor. How many counselors have been a client in a counseling relationship? This experience would help him to more effectively understand the cognitive and affective elements in counseling and the goals of counseling.

The inability of a counselor to develop an awareness of his own needs and the attitudes and values he holds will only lead students to continue to seek the advice and counsel of their peers and others than the professional staff. The bias of some counselors is evident in the treatment of the bright, normal and slow student, in expressed negative feelings about students who have

interests in certain academic and vocational areas, in reactions to students who exhibit certain personality characteristics, in reaction to certain groups of women and to women with high aspiration levels, and in negative behavior toward other staff members in the educational system. Thus some counselors gain their satisfactions and strengths through using others to support their biases and insecurities. Such a counselor has no regard for any of his clients. This is aggressive behavior which has the intent to hurt someone.

The counselor too often views himself as a clinical psychologist. He would do well to keep in mind Menninger's (1973) description of the psychotherapist who "seeks to be helpful directly, and though it is easy for him to talk too much and to express some opinions better suppressed, the psychotherapist will and should offer counsel, advice, warnings, and even prohibitions where a need for these is indicated." (pp. 214-215) And in a stronger stance he stresses, "His (the therapist's) responsibility to avert evil-doing, crime, and self-destruction is itself a moral stance, always present. He, too, must sometimes confront the patient with painful facts and endure his anger without being impatient." (p. 216)

The above point of view becomes important for the field of counseling because of the emphasis on dealing with morality. To cite Menninger (1973) again, "But moral leadership languishes and upon moral leadership we still rely for salvation." Since the counselor expresses his value system by means of his non-verbal behavior, then, why is he so hesitant to discuss values, attitudes, and need systems and the morality of behavior with his client?

A basic reason for a counselor being unable and unwilling to consider

morality with his client rests in a lack of understanding of the goals of counseling. It is also possible that the subject of morality is threatening to the counselor. To lead the client from a state of dependence to independence is erroneously stressed by some counselors as the prime goal of counseling. Some persons who have attained independence are dictators, hermits, wife-beaters, many activists, violators of law and authority, and some college presidents, academic deans, student personnel deans, counselors, and counselor educators. Therefore, there are many men, women, and children who have attained independence and who have not attained self-responsibility.

The concept of personal responsibility is the basis for a rational concept of independence. It is necessary for a person to accept and to like himself before he can accept and love another. Acceptance of self is basic to change, to the movement away from the depressive states that undesirable behavior brings forth. Undesirable? To whom? The moral code of the society in which one resides, as the Judeo-Christian code, is a necessary foundation for an individual's development. A person can learn this in counseling as well as in other learning structures.

The inability of many counselors to comprehend their place within the totality of any educational institution is primarily due to their concept of "I am a counselor--nothing else." However, to be effective and to gain a concept of self within the learning process, the counselor must also be able to function in consultation and in total education. His concept of self must be, "I am foremost an educator and to achieve that end I counsel and consult." To be effective as a counselor, this must be the applied psychological approach utilized regardless of the level in education that we may work. Only through

such an approach can the counselor be effective in moral leadership. When he accepts this role he will understand his role and function as a service agent.

The counselor is taught that he lives in isolation. Satisfaction is received by effectively helping a client--in a counseling office. But the means by which the counselor is taught to gain the knowledge necessary to know the needs and the attitudes and the values of the culture from which his client comes is extremely limited. Therefore, the counselor must move out of the counseling office into the world of the client and utilize his skills in multitudinous structures.

Before the counselor is able to move into other learning systems, he must know the specific purposes of the institution in which he works. He must also accept and understand the processes utilized to attain these goals. This does not mean that he will not work toward change, but that he will do so within the existing structure. This is basic to understanding who, as a person, he is in that system.

Although the elementary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools do not offer the extended campus systems of education found in higher education, they do have an extended community sometimes representing more diverse cultural systems. It is in all of these areas that the counselor can participate as a community member, a consultant, a trainer, an evaluator, as well as being a counselor.

In the late 1950's the counseling professional organizations were able to effect a change by which counselors were relieved of their teaching function so that they restricted their activities to the counseling offices. Some

counselors who have returned to the classroom for one class, have been able to establish more meaningful relationships with students. Those students are better able to learn what a counselor does and the various services he offers. The counselor in this structure can learn much about each individual student and he takes on a defined leadership role. The counselor learns much about himself. This does not mean every counselor should move to a classroom experience, but those who have something special to offer to the varied programmed and unprogrammed experiences in education must do so. He must search out those areas other than counseling where he can consult, advise, evaluate, observe, and lead in the total educational environment. The elementary school counselor has in many ways developed such a model.

With the great number of students to be served, how are you going to help them? What kinds of help do they need? What services are other educators able to extend? Can you help them and they you? Are guidance systems still necessary where a concept of prevention has merit or do we continue to emphasize a psychotherapeutic structure where we only relate with those we call sick? Is it any wonder that counselors are unable to define themselves and question the worthwhileness of their work and themselves? Maybe this is why many effective counselors have moved into other areas of education or out of the educational field.

It is evident from the foregoing that counselor education institutions have to consider priority levels in the training of counselors. The experiences presented to the trainee must first relate to the trainee as a person and then present experiences for the trainee to be able to learn effective relationships with others. These latter experiences must be in the

real life settings. Only in such a structure will the counselor be able to define himself and evaluate his professional goals.

The counselor is first an educator and to be an effective educator he will at times wear different hats. He must learn to relate to all persons who exist in the varied learning climates in which his clients reside. Counselors have defined themselves so narrowly in their professional roles that they have, as a result, defined themselves narrowly as personalities.

Counselors have ignored their responsibilities in helping clients understand the moral issues in society so that the client can make realistic decisions. Counselors have learned to control their relationships with others so as not to impose their attitudes and values on their clients, but they do have responsibilities to make known, to their clients, the moral issues of our society if clients are to make decisions for the attainment of self-responsibility.

Finally, directors of counseling programs must take responsibility for establishing learning systems for staff members to grow as persons and as professionals. The limited vision of a director will result in restrictive learning of the staff and the students in that institution. Inner strength for all educators will only be found in total community action.

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